MONTY ALEXANDER

HARLEM-KINGSTON EXPRESS

LIVE! AT DIZZY'S CLUB *COCA-COLA*, NYC

& IN JAMAICA, GERMANY, FRANCE *and* HOLLAND

1 **STRAWBERRY HILL** 4:09
M. Alexander-G. Browne - D. J. Jones (Monass Music/BMI)

2 **HIGH HEEL SNEAKERS** 4:02
R. Higgenbotham (Lily Pond Music/Delo Music Ent Pub Group/BMI)

3 **KING TUBBY MEETS THE ROCKERS UPTOWN** 6:02
H. Swaby-A. Pablo (Bug Music LTD/ASCAP)

4 **ELEUTHERA** 5:56
M. Alexander (Monass Music/BMI)

5 **SWEET GEORGIA BROWN** 5:08
B. Bernie-K. Casey-M. Pinkard (Warner Chappel Music Inc./ASCAP)

6 **FREDDIE FREELOADER (RIDDIM)** 2:07
M. Davis (Jazz Horn Music Corp/BMI)

7 **THE HEATHEN** 4:56
B. Marley (Blue Mountain Music/ASCAP)

8 **COMPASSION** 5:03
M. Jackson (Reecie Music/BMI)

9 **RUNNING AWAY** 6:46
B. Marley (Blue Mountain Music Ltd/ASCAP)

10 **DAY-O (BANANA BOAT SONG)** 5:24
W. Attaway-I. Burgie (Caribe Music Corp/Chrysalis One Music/ASCAP)

11 **NO WOMAN NO CRY** 7:06
B. Marley-V. Ford (Blue Mountain Music Ltd/ASCAP)

ALL SONGS ARRANGED BY MONTY ALEXANDER

**PRODUCED BY MONTY ALEXANDER,
JANA HERZEN, TODD BARKAN AND KATHERINE MILLER**

**RECORDED LIVE AT DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA (JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER)
AND IN JAMAICA, GERMANY, HOLLAND AND FRANCE.**

MUSICIANS

TRACKS 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10
MONTY ALEXANDER piano
ROBERT THOMAS percussion
OBED CALVAIRE drums
HASSAN SHAKUR acoustic bass
KARL WRIGHT drums
HOOVA SIMPSON electric bass
ANDY BASSFORD electric guitar
YOTAM SILBERSTEIN guitar

TRACKS 1, 8, 9
ROBERT BROWNE guitar
DESMOND JACK JONES drums
GLEN BROWNE electric bass
CHRISTOPHER McDONALD keyboards
BERNARD MONTGOMERY melodica (track 8)

TRACK 11
HASSAN SHAKUR acoustic bass
FRITS LANDESBERGEN drums

Tracks 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10: Recorded at Dizzy's Club *Coca-Cola*, Jazz at Lincoln Center, June 19, 2010
Tracks 1, 8, 9, 11: Recorded in Jamaica, Germany, France & Holland from 2006 to 2009
Produced by Monty Alexander, Jana Herzen, Todd Barkan and Katherine Miller
Dizzy's tracks recorded by Jeff "Jedi Master" Jones for Jazz at Lincoln Center
Mixed by Katherine Miller

Mastered by Alan Silverman, Arf Studios, NYC
Executive Producer: Jana Herzen
Production Consultant: Adrian Harpham
Package Design: Rebecca Meek (rebeccameek.com)
Photography: Alan Nahigian (booklet pages 1, 6-7, 10)
Crush Boone (back cover, inside panel);
Courtesy of The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Page 11).

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Special thanks to the folks at Jazz at Lincoln Center
and everyone along the world track!

COMMANDER 'ZANDER'S HARLEM-KINGSTON EXPRESS

Monty Alexander can hardly suppress a playful smile when he takes the microphone to greet a live audience. He holds back long enough to raise an eyebrow and get into his matinee idol character: "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," he states in a voice lifted straight from the countless American Western films he's absorbed over the years. Without pause, he continues in deep Jamaican patois, largely unin-telligible to the uninitiated: "Me jus a come from foreign an ting and bwai, dem mon deh dem talk funny!" The schtick perfectly reveals two sides of the man, one part the true Jamaican and one part the true American. Monty Alexander sits as naturally within this duality as he does within the reggae/jazz ensemble assembled for the present recording, HARLEM-KINGSTON EXPRESS.

In a career spanning more than 50 years and more than 60 albums at the forefront of jazz, Alexander has used his virtuosic gifts to bring attention to an array of Jamaican musical idioms that he holds dear. While jazz's urban sophistication and the American songbook lured the teen prodigy more than 50 years ago, the down home spirit of Jamaican music has continued to enchant him and remind him of his roots all the while. Through the years, Alexander has created jazz/reggae arrangements that employ a jazz rhythm section throughout, but the Harlem-Kingston Express features two rhythm sections running on parallel tracks. Stage left sits an accomplished reggae posse: a full rock drum kit, electric bass, electric 'skank' guitar, and an array of percussion. Stage right sits a traditional jazz rhythm section: jazz drum kit, acoustic bass, and semi-acoustic archtop guitar. Commander 'Zander (as his friends have been calling him since he was awarded the national honor of 'Commander in the Order of Distinction' from the Jamaican government in 2000) holds forth on his piano, comfortably nestled between the two units, swinging the sound seamlessly from jazz to reggae to full band fusion and back according to his musical whim and design. The configuration is a delight to experience and underscores the subtlety and expertise required to play each form with authenticity.

"For a long time I've been playing live with [jazz] trios," explains Alexander. "That's the most practical way to do [my] music. I've never pursued horn players to join me, because I'm completely at home in the setting where there's an acoustic bass and drums, and they're supplying the basic sound and textures. I used to play songs that reflected my Jamaican heritage, with the other [jazz] musicians, but when I would play with the Jamaican players, and we would play things in that direction, that's when it really took on the authenticity, which is what I'm going for every time."

Alexander's reputation as the leader of hard swinging jazz trios is the direct extension of a legacy he unofficially inherited from the late jazz titan Oscar Peterson. Having worked extensively with jazz icons like Ray Brown and Milt Jackson in the 1960s, Alexander's jazz credentials are unassailable, linking him to the music's founding fathers. Among them, Duke Ellington and Miles Davis were behind the scenes supporters of the pianist early in his career. In many ways Alexander's passion for jazz's hard bop heyday separated him from his contemporaries in the 1960s who were greatly affected by the free jazz movement and who rejected to varying degrees the formality of jazz's first 60 years. Notably, one of Alexander's early performances in New York was at Harlem's iconic Minton's Playhouse, and Harlem's jazz legacy has remained dear to him.

As the 1970s moved forward, reggae emerged as an international music form, while Alexander had established the credibility necessary to bring more and more Jamaican references into his jazz. Most of those efforts involved bringing Jamaican melodic themes into the jazz context, as opposed to full-blown reggae arrangements. "It was a while before I said [to myself], if I want to do this music and pick from the whole palette — which is everything from Duke Ellington, Bob Marley, and my own pieces, etc., then I'm going to do what I want to do and bring two rhythm sections together. That way, it all can be available to me, whatever I feel, the whole time. Because I feel American [and] I feel Jamaican, and the rhythms that come from the street and the country in America are just as meaningful to me as the vibrations that come from Jamaica. It's like, [my] left hand and [my] right hand.

"And according to my whims, as I start playing the music, and the spirit moves me, I say, 'I think I want to go Uptown right now. We're going to go to 125th Street [Harlem].' Bap!, and I give it to the [jazz] trio. Then I say, 'Alright, we're going right down to Trenchtown [Kingston],' and then at the right moment, I invite everybody to share in this world experience.

"It's just a wonderful coming together of hearts and minds and brotherhood between musicians. I'm at the piano, and [the piano] becomes the meeting place. And when I play this music this way, it's cathartic. These days I call it the Harlem- Kingston Express. The great players of jazz and the great players of Jamaican music, and it has always been a positive experience."

The present collection of live recordings represents the first release of Alexander's Harlem-Kingston Express on disc. Centered around a series of dates at Dizzy's Club *Coca-Cola* at Jazz at Lincoln Center in New York City recorded in the summer of 2010, the set is augmented by performances from Jamaica, Germany, France, and the Netherlands. The *Wall Street Journal* rated Alexander's week of performances at Dizzy's as the highlight of the summer arts season in New York City in 2010, topping the Mostly Mozart Festival, the Fringe Festival, and the New York City Ballet.

These superlative accolades are typical of those Alexander has received throughout his career, where he is usually considered in any conversation about jazz's greatest piano virtuosos. His achievements have brought him to headline at virtually all of the world's major jazz venues and festivals. His 1976 Montreux Jazz Festival record-ing with bassist John Clayton and drummer Jeff Hamilton is one of the most celebrated live jazz albums of the past 50 years.

For Alexander, jazz ultimately is not about cultural sophistication or technical prowess but rather human connections and the simple joy of living. "Jazz is actually not a style, it's a democracy. Jazz is a thing that says, 'I can accept you and bring you into my expression.' It's not necessarily this or that. You can have a million explanations, but for me, it's a democracy... I feel a privileged sense, being a part of the so-called jazz world, but for me to introduce people who are about jazz to something I'm so joyful about, which I grew up with... it's a wonderful experience, because I find myself able to bring people together with the music."

At the end of the day, Alexander has managed to define a creative space that welcomes accomplished musicians from around the world and audience members from every culture and walk of life. The Harlem Kingston Express is the latest engine to propel him and his fans on what has become a truly unique musical journey, full steam ahead!

— CARTER VAN PELT *April 2011*

Carter Van Pelt has been documenting Jamaican popular music as a writer, radio broadcaster, and archivist since the early 1990s.

THE HARLEM-KINGSTON EXPRESS AT DIZZY'S CLUB *COCA-COLA*, JUNE 19, 2010

KARL WRIGHT drums **YOTAM SILBERSTEIN** guitar **HASSAN SHAKUR** acoustic bass **MONTY ALEXANDER** piano **OBED CALVAIRE** drums **ROBERT THOMAS** percussion **HOOVA SIMPSON** electric bass **ANDY BASSFORD** electric guitar (not shown)

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